

Dagger of the Mind

by Nan Smith

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Summary: What if it wasn't the collision with the Nightfall asteroid that caused Clark Kent's amnesia in the episode All Shook Up? What if it was caused by something else? And what if he encountered it again?

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Forward:

The story of Superman's encounter with the Nightfall Asteroid and what happened later always bothered me. I thought there must be more to the story than we were able to see in the 46 minutes or so of "All Shook Up". His amnesia after slamming into the asteroid was wrong. Amnesia can follow a head injury, but it is of a specific type, called "retrograde amnesia" in which the victim forgets what happened to him for the past 24 hours or so, not his whole life and identity. (This information is courtesy of my father, a very fine doctor and retired Navy commander.) The kind of memory loss he exhibited is associated with a psychological problem called "hysterical amnesia", usually caused by an intense desire to forget. The blow to the head is just the mind's excuse for the condition.

So, what if something more concrete caused Clark's amnesia?

Suppose there was a chunk of Kryptonite buried in Nightfall, composed not only of green, but a little red as well? And what might have happened after he shattered the big asteroid if that piece had somehow reached Earth and he ran into it again?

This story takes place between "Whine, Whine, Whine" and "And The Answer Is..." I hope you enjoy it.

As always, the characters portrayed in this story are the property of D.C. Comics, Warner Bros. et al. and I am only borrowing them for awhile, and I have to credit the title to the bard of Avon (Macbeth, Act II Scene 2) but the story is my idea and my property, so here goes...

* * *

>Dagger of the Mind <p>by Nan Smith<p>

Introduction:

It had begun its journey 29 years before, a dull chunk of crystal which glowed a sickly green, speckled with tiny flecks of red; a piece no larger than a man's fist, fused and pitted with the tremendous heat that had formed it.

It had been part of a planet once, flung into space with the force of the explosion that had destroyed a world, then caught in the hyperlight field of a tiny ship that escaped the destruction by bare minutes, and in that way it reached the Solar System.

But here chance intervened. Well behind the other pieces of the planet Krypton that trailed the ship, it encountered an obstacle rolling through space on its own track and smashed into it at high speed. Embedded now in the mindless mass of rock which years later would be called the Nightfall Asteroid, it continued its slightly delayed journey toward Earth. And for 27 years nothing happened.

The destruction of Nightfall by Superman was followed beginning a few days later, by nearly a week of nights made spectacular by shooting stars, harmless debris left over from the shattered asteroid, most of which vaporized in the Earth's atmosphere. But here and there a piece survived and became the subject of intense interest by the scientific community, and others, fortune hunters who collected and sold such articles for profit. One piece was found in Northern Africa over a year later and eventually packed into a crate with other items of value and sent by various channels to the United States, where there was money to be made from those who collected such treasures. The chunk of crystal, buried in the rock, lay there anonymous, waiting.

* * *

>Clark Kent entered his apartment and resisted the urge to slam the door behind him. He had run out on Lois again, and her angry words were still ringing in his ears. "If you run away again, Clark Kent, don't even bother coming back!" <p>He had gone anyway to deal with a gang war down at the riverfront. Of course, Lois couldn't know that. All she had seen was that Clark Kent, who had promised not to run away, was doing it again and now she was certainly so angry at him that she really wouldn't want to see him. He had changed to Clark Kent afterwards to interview the police who were herding the gang members into police vans and paramedics treating the wounded, then come home to try to figure out what to do. This couldn't go on; hurting Lois like this was tearing him up, too. Something had to be

done.<p>

He flung himself onto the sofa, kicking himself again. What was he, a coward? He'd faced all kinds of dangers, one way or another, but this one small woman had the power to make or break the rest of his life, and, face it, she scared him silly.

What was he going to do?

He dropped his head into his hands, trying to think, but nothing coherent would come, other than the fact that he had blown it again and Lois was never going to forgive him. This had been the final straw.

Something was tugging at him for attention, but it was several minutes before he noticed and when he did it seemed simply like the cap off to a lousy evening.

His wallet was missing. He must have lost it somewhere on the riverfront.

The discovery seemed almost funny. He laughed, but it wasn't a happy laugh. Somehow, he had to figure out a way to tell Lois how he felt without one of these damned interruptions getting in the way. If she would even listen. He was fresh out of excuses, angry at himself, angry at circumstances, almost ready to give up the whole Superman thing altogether. Superman was playing havoc with his life. Was it really worth it?

Slowly the anger drained away, leaving depression in its wake. For an unmeasured time he sat staring blankly at nothing, then roused himself with a jerk. This was getting him nowhere fast. There had to be a way to do this, even if he had to write it down and let her read it. Not exactly romantic, but certainly better than what was going on now.

Well, why not? At least a letter wasn't going to give her some lame excuse and dash off to rescue somebody while she was reading it!

Writing about how he felt, putting it down in ink on paper, couldn't be considered exactly easy, either. Composing a love letter wasn't only embarrassing, it wasn't even his style. Besides, he had no previous experience, and the last thing he wanted was some juvenile-sounding effort that would make her sneer in contempt. After all, he was a journalist; he made his living with words. This had better be good or he might as well not try. For some time he stared at the paper, trying to formulate in his head what he really wanted to say, but at last he sighed. Never mind the fancy wording; just say it. Chewing on his lip, he began to write.

He had written a total of six sentences when the inevitable happened. He couldn't even write a letter without being interrupted. The sounds of disaster always crept in, whether he wanted them to or not.

With a sigh of exasperation he plunked the letter onto the coffee table, set his glasses on top of it to hold it in place and spun into the suit. Superman wasn't being given any breaks tonight. Maybe the Fates had it in for him. Without further thought, he launched himself through the window and made a beeline for the harbor.

* * *

>At least the emergency was a real emergency. As Superman arrowed toward Metropolis Harbor, he could see the smoke billowing up into the late evening sky, black and ugly against the first stars. He could hear the cries and screams of human beings trying desperately to escape the conflagration, the shriek of sirens as the fire control boats headed toward the burning cargo ship.<p><p>

Within seconds he was on the scene and drew in his breath in horror. The ship was engulfed in smoke and flames. The fire had spread rapidly, to all appearances. People were literally leaping from the blazing decks to get away from the heat, struggling to put some distance between themselves and the inferno behind them. He saw men who obviously could not swim thrashing in the water, apparently willing to chance drowning rather than stay to be roasted alive on the deathtrap that had once been a ship. He moved in fast, scooping men from the water with as much speed as he could manage without seriously injuring anyone. There were probably a few strained muscles here and there, but if he was to save the lives of the crew he could not afford to waste time.

There were fire control boats on the scene, of course, but no one wanted to get very close; there was too much chance of an explosion. The fire was much too hot. Something of which he wasn't aware must be feeding the flames.

He scooped the last man from the water, dropped him on the deck of a rescue craft and flew back to the ship. His x-ray vision told him that there were no more people trapped, but the fire was growing by the second. Whatever was fueling this thing must be really volatile. He dived into the innards of the craft, trying to snuff the flames with super-cooled breath. His hopes weren't high. The fire had apparently started in the cargo hold and was eating at every flammable surface. There wasn't anything more to do. For a second he smelled an odor, almost unrecognizable amid the acrid smoke, and a jolt of pain contracted his muscles. Something was terribly wrong.

It was his last coherent thought before the ship blew. He wasn't even aware of his body thrown halfway across the harbor, or of the cold water of the bay closing over his head.

* * *

>Lois Lane stood on the dock amid a crowd of other reporters, watching Superman's dramatic rescue of the cargo ship's crew, then gasped in horror at the magnitude of the explosion. Superman was thrown through the air to splash down violently in the water. She waited, counting the seconds. Where was he? The familiar blue and red figure did not reappear and in the dusk that was rapidly falling she couldn't tell if he was floating on the surface or had sunk. One of the Harbor Patrol boats was speeding toward the site, its floodlight fixed on something in the water.<p><p>

"What's going on?" Jimmy Olsen asked from behind her. "Do you see him?"

"I can't tell..." The boat was circling, light rotating to remain on

one spot. Now it was pulling to a stop. A man in a life jacket jumped from the side, but she couldn't see...

"They've got him!" a woman shouted.

Lois felt her stomach contract in a hard knot. They were pulling someone from the water all right, someone in red and blue who sagged like a rag doll as he was lifted to the waiting hands above.

"My God..." a voice said from somewhere to her left. "Do you suppose he's dead?"

"Of course he's not dead!" Lois didn't recognize her own voice. "He can't be!" She spun, beginning to push her way through the mob of spectators and members of the press. "Come on, Jimmy!"

"Where are we going?" Jimmy was right behind her.

"They'll take him to Metropolis General! We have to get there first!"

* * *

>"But Superman's a friend of mine! You have to let me see him!" Lois clenched her fists in frustration. The admitting nurse wasn't impressed. "Miss Lane, the doctors are examining him now. We can't release any statement at this time."<p><p>

"I don't want a statement! I just want to know if he's all right!"

The woman's expression didn't change. "I can't tell you what I don't know. When they finish they'll be able to tell you a lot more. Why don't you sit down over there and wait. Standing here blocking traffic isn't going to make them finish any sooner."

Lois had to admit the justice of the statement but it didn't make it any easier. She had seen him loaded into the ambulance and the sight had not been reassuring. Someone had been giving him oxygen and the sight of the all-powerful superhero in such straits was nearly enough to make her burst into tears. If only Clark were here, but she wasn't speaking to him right now. She wasn't sure she would ever speak to him again after this evening.

"Miss Lane--" The admitting nurse was beginning to sound a little irritated. "There are several people behind you. Please go sit down."

Without another word, Lois moved away. At least she could phone in the story, such as it was. The fact that she was a known friend of Superman had kept her from being thrown out of here with the other reporters; she didn't want to push her luck too far but it galled her that she wasn't being allowed to see him. The Man of Steel could be in there dying right now and there was absolutely nothing she could do for him. Being helpless wasn't something she could resign herself to easily, especially regarding her friends, and Superman definitely qualified as a friend, considering how many times he'd saved her life in the last two years. Even if he wasn't considered a suitor anymore, he was still important to her, but all she could do now was wait.

It was a little more than an hour later when an emergency room doctor stepped out into the waiting room. "Miss Lane?"

She was on her feet at once. "Yes? Is he all right?"

"Step in here, please." The woman gestured her through the door and led the way into a small cubicle that was apparently her office. "Sit down."

Lois sat, gripping her hands in her lap. This was already not looking good. "How is he? Is he all right?"

The doctor frowned. "More or less. This is off the record, is that understood? He regained consciousness in the ambulance. We're keeping him overnight for observation, but except for having inhaled some water, he's physically okay." She paused.

Something didn't sound right. "Then what's the matter?"

The doctor bit her lip. "Ordinarily I wouldn't tell you this, but as far as we know Superman hasn't anyone to contact. You, and your editor, Mr. White is it?--" at Lois's nod she continued, "--Seem to be the only ones who have any connection with him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Part of the problem is that we know nothing about Kryptonian physiology," the doctor said. "He seems alert and aware of what's happening to him now, but he doesn't remember who he is or what happened to him out there on the bay. Naturally this is somewhat disturbing, both to him and to us."

Lois could imagine. "Can I see him?"

The doctor nodded. "I think that might be a good idea. He's a little upset. Maybe you can help settle him down."

* * *

>Superman was sitting up on the emergency room examining table when she entered the curtained booth. The top of his uniform was around his waist, and a hospital gown hung halfway off of his muscular torso. His face was puckered in a frown as he stared at the hands clasped in his lap.<p><p>

Lois smiled tentatively. "Hello, Superman." She was dismayed by the lost look on his face as he met her eyes. "I heard what happened to you."

"They tell me I was caught in an explosion."

"Yes. I'm a friend of yours. My name is Lois Lane."

He didn't smile, but the lost look eased slightly. "You know me?"

"Yes. I've been your friend for two years. May I sit down?"

"Sure." Even a catastrophic thing like this couldn't take away his instinctive courtesy, Lois thought. She took the chair near the head

of the examining table.

"You saved a lot of lives," she said. "I saw you. It was impressive."

"I don't remember. What do I do now?"

Lois stood up and put a hand over his clasped ones. "They want you to stay here overnight so they can be sure you're okay, then you're coming with me. I'll tell you about yourself and help you remember. It will be all right, I promise."

He nodded hesitantly. "That sounds better than anything I've been able to think of."

She patted his hands. "Try not to worry about it right now -- God, that sounds so stupid, doesn't it! -- but, try, anyway. Your memory will come back. You never stay sick long." Well, that might be only technically true, but she wasn't going to introduce any more complications right now. The last thing the guy needed was more things to worry about. "Just take it easy and rest. I'll be back in the morning to get you."

He nodded. "All right. I guess I don't have much choice, do I?"

"Well, you could check out right now, but I don't recommend it. Let the doctors do their jobs and you and I will take it from there."

A ghost of a smile. "All right."

She squeezed his hands. "Would you like me to stay for awhile?"

He hesitated. "Would you mind?"

"Not at all." She glanced around as a nurse entered. "What happens now?"

The nurse was an older woman, perhaps fifty with a sturdy, no-nonsense air. "We see about getting Superman into a room for the night. If you'd like to go with him you can. Or, if you'd like to get him a bag..."

She felt herself blushing. "I guess you can't sleep in your uniform, can you? And hospital gowns are a bit drafty. I'll tell you what, I'm going to get you something to wear, then I'll come back. Will that be all right?"

He nodded. "That sounds like a good idea."

"Okay, I'll be back in about an hour."

She returned in less than the promised time. Clark had not answered his phone, but Jimmy had come through with some baggy sweatpants and a sweatshirt which she presented to Superman. He retired to the bathroom to change and emerged a few minutes later, the uniform dangling limply from one hand. Lois felt her eyebrows rise at the sight. She had never seen him in anything but his uniform before, but apparently the man made anything look good. She took the Superman suit with a smile. "This is kind of a mess. I'll get it washed and

bring it back in the morning."

"I appreciate that." He met her gaze soberly. "I hope I'm not being too much trouble."

"Of course not! What are friends for? Besides, I'm just glad you're all right. For a while I was scared we'd lost you."

He shook his head. "I don't seem to be hurt at all. I just can't remember anything."

"And that's a temporary condition. Tomorrow I'm going to take you to the Daily Planet -- that's where I work. You have friends who work there besides me -- Jimmy Olsen, Perry White, my partner Clark Kent. We'll all help you to remember. Clark can probably help more than all the rest of us. He's your closest friend and knows the most about you."

"That's reassuring." He settled down on top of the bed covers. "Have I ever done anything like this before? Lost my memory, I mean?"

"Not to my knowledge," Lois said. "My partner did, once. He got knocked down by a car and hit his head and for a couple of days he didn't remember a thing, but after a while everything came back. Your memory will, too."

"Thanks." He smiled hesitantly. "I'm feeling a little better now. For a while it was pretty scary...not knowing who I was, or what was happening. Even if I don't remember, at least somebody else does." He grinned slightly at his own feeble joke. "I guess that's something, huh?"

* * *

>After she left the hospital, Lois tried again to call Clark, but she only got his answering machine. Wherever he was, he hadn't come home. Lois was still angry at him but it would have been nice to be able to talk to him about Superman. The superhero could use someone else to talk to besides her, but, as usual, when someone needed him, he was nowhere to be found.<p><p>

To be entirely fair, that really wasn't true but he had hurt her tonight. She wasn't ready to forgive him yet. In any case, she would see him tomorrow, and then she intended to give him a piece of her mind.

There was only one thing wrong with her plan. When she walked into the Daily Planet the next morning, Superman in tow, Clark was nowhere to be seen. Heads turned as she entered, the tall, impressive young man in his bright red and blue suit beside her, and Perry White emerged from his office to greet the Man of Steel.

"Hello, Superman, I'm Perry White, the editor here. You make yourself at home, son." He lowered his voice. "We're all going to try to help you remember things, okay?" He gestured to Jimmy. "This is Jimmy Olsen, one of our photographers. He's a friend of yours, too."

Jimmy thrust out a hand. "Hi, Superman. Glad to see you looking better than you were last night. If you have any questions I can answer, I'll be glad to help you."

"Uh, thanks...Jimmy." Superman shook his hand and glanced around.
"Lois said Clark Kent would be here?"

"Kent's late this morning," Perry said, a slight frown on his face.
"He hasn't called in, so I expect he'll be here soon."

"Lois said he knows more about me than anyone. I could sure stand to talk to him."

Perry clapped him lightly on the shoulder. "Any of us will be glad to help you if we can, son. You've done more for Metropolis than people even remember. Have a seat over at Clark's desk until he gets here, and if you have any questions, ask."

* * *

>Lois frowned at Clark's desk where Superman was sitting. It wasn't like Clark to not show up without at least calling. After a moment, she picked up the phone and dialed his number, but only the telephone answering machine came on the line. She left a message for him to call her when he got in and hung up. When she looked back, Superman was watching her. "Is there something wrong, Lois?"<p><p>

"I'm just surprised Clark hasn't even called the office. This isn't like him."

"Well, maybe he got called out of town? A family emergency?"

"That's a thought." Lois waved to Jimmy, who came hurrying over.
"Jimmy, dig out all the articles we've done about Superman. All the interviews, everything. If he reads them, it may help jog his memory. And Superman, after you've read them we'll talk about them and fill in as many blanks as possible. All right?"

"Sure. Actually, it sounds like a good idea. Thanks."

"I'm full of good ideas," Lois said. She flashed him a smile, then turned to her computer. After a moment, she picked up the phone again and dialed another number.

Martha Kent answered. "Hello?"

"Hi, Martha, it's Lois."

"Oh, hi, Lois! How are you?"

"I'm fine." Lois hesitated a moment, then plunged ahead. "Have you heard from Clark today? He's not at work and hasn't called in. I was wondering if there was a problem."

"No, dear, we haven't heard from him for several days."

"Oh." Lois was at a bit of a loss. "I thought maybe you'd have heard something. Usually he calls if he isn't going to be here."

"Well, I'm sure he's all right." There was a pause. "We saw what happened to Superman on TV last night. How is he?"

"Oh, uh, he's fine." Lois hesitated. "The explosion kind of stunned

him. He was pretty shaken up and they took him to the hospital as a precaution, but he was okay. I talked to him last night and this morning."

"Oh, good. I was a little worried, but I didn't think it could be serious. I'm sure Clark is all right, Lois. He'll show up after while. Tell him to call me when he comes in. Jonathan and I are flying to Metropolis tonight and I want to let him know when our plane will be arriving."

"Uh, sure, Martha. Um, excuse me, but I have another call coming in. I have to go."

Lois hung up. She felt guilty fibbing to Martha, but it had been agreed that the news about Superman's memory loss should not be advertised. If the criminal element found out, the results would not be pretty. She submerged her stab of conscience after a moment and called Clark's apartment again. Again the telephone answering machine came on and she left another message to call back.

Superman was engrossed in the articles supplied by Jimmy. Lois fidgeted a few moments more, then resolutely turned on her computer and began to reread the article she had written last night. She was vaguely dissatisfied with it and busied herself with revising it to her exacting standards. Underneath, her slight uneasiness was turning to genuine worry.

An hour went by, then another. When the elevator door opened, she looked around, expecting to see Clark, but instead Sergeant Zymack stepped out. He strolled into the newsroom and up to her desk.

"Hi, Miss Lane. Kent around?"

Lois swallowed. "No, he's not here. Can I help you, Sergeant?"

The officer glanced at Superman out of the corner of his eye. "How's the big guy?"

"He's doing okay, Zymack. He's catching up on all the information we have about him. What about Clark?"

Zymack reached into a pocket and removed a leather wallet. "One of our guys found this early this morning, down by Metropolis River where it runs into the Hobbs. Thought I'd drop it by on my way past. Can you pass it along to him when you see him?" He flipped it open. "I'm afraid his money and credit cards are gone -- he better get those canceled -- but his driver's license and other stuff is still there. Thought he'd be relieved to hear that."

Lois took the wallet and glanced inside. It was Clark's all right. She set it down on her desk. "Thanks, Zymack, I'll see to it that he gets it."

"Thanks, Lane. It'll save me a detour." Zymack grinned, raised a hand and departed at his usual leisurely pace. Lois continued to look at Clark's wallet. They'd found it down by the river? What had Clark been doing down there last night?

Superman glanced up from his study of the articles. "What's the matter, Lois?"

"Clark's wallet was found down by the river this morning. All his money and credit cards are missing."

"Well, if somebody found it they might have taken the valuable stuff and thrown the rest away."

"Yes, but what was it doing down there in the first place?" Lois gripped the wallet in one hand. "And how did he lose his wallet? He could have been mugged or something."

Superman got out of the chair. "If you're that worried, maybe we'd better try and find him."

Lois rose to her feet. "You're right. At least we can try. It's better than sitting around worrying. He was probably down at that gang war you broke up last night...I know you don't remember, but you did. Maybe somebody picked his pocket. I'll be right back; I'm going to tell Perry where we're going."

"Where are we going?"

Lois hesitated. "I think we'll try his apartment first. He might be sick or something, and if he's not there maybe he left some kind of message or clue. Anyway, it's a shot."

* * *

>Clark's apartment was locked up tight and all her knocking elicited no response. Superman glanced at her questioningly. "Now what? Should we get the manager?"<p><p>

"Just a minute. Lois fumbled in her purse for the picklock one of her contacts had acquired for her. "Let's see if this will work."

"You carry a picklock in your purse?"

"Well, some men carry nude photographs in their wallets. I carry a picklock in my purse." Lois inserted the instrument and concentrated on her job. Superman looked somewhat at a loss as to how to reply to her remark, and prudently kept silent as she worked.

Ten minutes later she gave up in frustration. "He must have gotten this thing replaced after he was robbed that time. I can't do a thing. We'll have to get the manager."

Superman nodded, giving the door an experimental shove. The panel splintered as the bolt tore out of its frame. He stared at his hand in shock. "My God! Did I do that?"

Lois nodded, a little shocked, herself. She had forgotten what damage could be done by a man whose super powers were out of control. The time the magician's assistant had hypnotized him and convinced him that wrong was right came vividly to mind. But this wasn't a case like that. He simply had not realized his strength.

"We'll have to get that fixed later," she said as matter-of-factly as she could. "You're very strong. Try to remember so you don't do something like that again."

"I will." He still looked a little stunned. "I'm sorry."

She patted his arm. "It's okay. Clark will understand. You have several special abilities; remember the articles? I'll try to tell you about them, later. Come on."

They pushed the broken door wider and entered. The apartment was lit. Clark had not turned out the lights last night, Lois thought. That wasn't like him. He was usually careful about things like that...

"Clark?" she called. "Are you all right?"

There was no answer. The living room was deserted. Quickly she checked the bedroom, half expecting her partner to be there sick or...she didn't even want to think about that. The place was empty, but the telephone answering machine light was blinking. She checked the messages. The ones she had left last night were there. He had not been home since then. Then she saw the note.

Why she hadn't noticed it before she didn't know. It was lying on the coffee table with Clark's glasses sitting on it and a ballpoint pen on the floor beside the table. She picked it up, recognizing Clark's distinctive handwriting at once. Maybe this was some sort of clue. She started to read, and as she did she felt the blood drain from her face. She was hardly aware of Superman grabbing her by the shoulders.

"Maybe you better sit down, Lois." He pushed her into a chair and was back again almost at once with a glass of water. "Here, drink this."

She obeyed, her mind numb with shock. Superman bent over her, his handsome face very concerned. "Lois? Are you all right? What was in that letter?"

She held it out to him, hand shaking so hard the paper rattled. He took it, frowning, and read it aloud.

"Dear Lois,

I ran out on you again this evening, and I know you're angry. You have every right to be. I've been trying to explain why for days now, and every time I do it seems I have to leave. I can't stand it. It's tearing me apart to see the pain I've caused you and I simply can't live with this anymore. I have to end the situation and I'm going to."

The note ended there. Lois felt as if the world had just dropped from under her. Clark, her partner, the man she loved, no matter how angry he sometimes made her, was dead? Had he actually been so despondent over what she had said that he...

Superman was kneeling beside her chair, frowning at the paper. "Do you think this is really what it looks like?" he asked, slowly. "Did something happen last night that could have caused him to..." He broke off, seeing her face. "I guess so."

"Clark and I are..." She paused and took a deep breath to steady her voice. "Clark and I are...dating," she said. "He's my partner and my

best friend...and a lot more, besides. But it seems like every time I try to talk seriously with him he panics and runs off. Last night I..." She choked a little. "Last night he did it again and I told him if he ran off not to bother to come back. I was so angry with him that I almost meant it then, but if he believed me..." She couldn't go on. To her horror she began to sob, right there in front of Superman, but the superhero didn't say a word. He simply put his arms around her and let her cry.

After a time the sobs began to run down and she became aware of her position, leaning on Superman's shoulder, his arms tightly around her in a comforting embrace. He seemed aware of the change and released her slowly, turning his head to look at her. The compassion in his face almost made her burst into tears again, but she resisted the feeling and swallowed the enormous lump in her throat. "I'm sorry."

He shook his head. "Why? Because you're human?" He cupped a hand gently along her jaw. "Better now?"

She nodded. "I made a mess of your shirt."

He glanced down at it indifferently. "It'll dry. Look, Lois, let's not jump the gun here. We can't be sure that this is what it looks like. Maybe it's some kind of mistake. We shouldn't just assume anything before we know."

A trace of hope surfaced. "Do you really think so?"

"I don't know, but I don't think we should just give up." He got to his feet with one graceful motion. "I do think we ought to call your boss. Maybe he's heard from Clark by now. In any case, he can set a few inquiries going. And after that, we should probably call the police."

"You're right." She knew a moment of wonder. Here was this man whose memory was gone, who was certainly under plenty of stress and probably fear, putting his own problems aside to comfort her. It gave her a deeper insight into Superman's character than she had ever had before in the two years she had known him. He genuinely cared about other people more than he did himself. Like Clark. No wonder the two of them were good friends.

"Thank you, Superman. I don't know what I'd have done without you." She reached for the phone.

* * *

>The next few hours went by in a kind of horrible blur. Perry had received no word from Clark, but he at once sent Jimmy to try to find out where he had been seen last the night before. The police came and questioned Lois, examined the note and searched the apartment. Inspector Henderson showed up unexpectedly to talk to her, looking more upset than he might have been willing to acknowledge aloud. He'd told her that in most circumstances no action was taken for 48 hours after the person was reported missing, but he knew Kent, and he was sure he wouldn't just vanish without a trace like this, especially without telling even his own partner, unless something serious had happened. He'd assured her that the department would do its best, but Lois could tell he wasn't holding out much hope. Kent didn't seem the

type, he'd told her, but he'd seen too many good people go off in a bout of depression and do something permanent before anyone could stop them. He just hoped they were wrong about Clark Kent.<p><p>

* * *

>Superman sat beside her on the sofa, holding one of her hands in a reassuring grip. He could see in her face the pain she was in and beside it his own situation paled to insignificance. Lois Lane was in trouble and it was killing him inside that he couldn't help her.<p><p>

Last night she had come to him when he'd been in the hospital emergency room, confused and frightened, and his heart had lifted at the sight of her, even though he didn't know why. She'd brought him clothes and stayed with him for several hours reassuring him just by her presence that things weren't as bad as they seemed, and that she would help him through this. Somehow, he'd believed her, and he had slept soundly for several hours, feeling oddly secure in spite of the confusion in his head. This morning she had been there for him, too, with his uniform all cleaned and ironed, and she had taken him with her, given him what information she had at her office, and again reassured him with her presence. Then this had happened, and all he could do was sit beside her and hold her hand while she was in an agony of fear for her partner, who obviously had no idea how fortunate he was to have her. He, Superman, was just her friend, but he had realized almost at once that the feelings he had for her were much more than just those of a friend, and if it turned out that this Clark Kent was alive after all, he, Superman, had every intention of taking him aside and having a man to man talk with him about just how he was treating this fantastic woman, a woman Superman would have given anything to have feel about him the way she obviously felt about Kent. She looked as if she had lost everything that meant anything in her life, and his heart ached for her.

The police were gone now, and someone was repairing the door that he had accidentally broken. Lois didn't say anything, and he couldn't think of anything to say, either. Both of them jumped when the phone rang. Superman answered it. "Hello?"

"Kent?" It was Perry White's voice, sounding almost shocked.

"Uh, no, sir, it's Superman. Have you heard anything?"

The editor's voice sounded tired. "You gave me a turn, son. You sound just like Kent over the phone. No, we haven't found out anything concrete. I do have some new information. How's Lois doin'?"

He glanced at her and replied carefully. "As well as anyone could expect."

"That bad, huh? Well, stay with her, son. If anyone can help her now, it's you. I just got a call from Henderson."

Superman braced himself, praying silently that he wasn't going to have to pass bad news along to Lois. "Yes?"

"What he says pretty much matches what we've been able to find out. The last time anyone saw Kent was last night, right after you broke up that little war on the riverfront. He phoned in the story and no

one's heard from him since. Henderson's interviewed some of the police that were there, and some of the paramedics. Kent apparently talked to a few of them for his report. The general consensus is that he seemed a little upset about somethin', but they were really too busy to talk much. They've checked the hospitals for anyone admitted last night without I.D., as well as the morgue. No results there either, thank Elvis. They're talkin' about draggin' the river, but don't tell Lois that. Jimmy's put Kent's picture on that new Missing Persons page on the Internet, and we're puttin' it on the front page of the paper. Maybe it'll bring in a tip or two. It's gonna be on LNN tonight, too. Tell Lois we're not givin' up. Got it?"

"Yes, sir. I'll do that. Thanks."

"She can hear you, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"She's takin' it pretty bad, I guess."

He glanced sideways at her woebegone face. "You could say that."

"Well, it's not lookin' too good, but that's a far cry from no hope. We'll keep tryin' until we know there's none left. You don't have to put it that way, though."

"I understand, Mr. White. I'm not leaving her, believe me."

"Good for you, son. Both of you hang in there. We'll work this out."

After he hung up, he relayed the gist of Perry's information to her. "Lois, we'll find him, one way or another." He tried to put as much reassurance into the words as he could.

"I just keep thinking about what I said last night. The last time he saw me, I was so angry at him. If this is all my fault, I'll hate myself forever."

"Lois." He put his arm around her and spoke seriously, looking her straight in the eyes. "It isn't your fault, understand? Everyone has to take some responsibility for him or herself. It isn't your fault that he chose to run off!"

"But if he was depressed enough to do...something like this...then I should have seen it. What kind of a friend am I that he could be feeling like that and I had no clue? If I pushed him past the breaking point..."

"Maybe he wasn't. This is still only a possibility, remember. He may be somewhere, perfectly all right and have no idea that people think he's..." He broke off. "Lois, you say he's my best friend. Tell me a little about him. I don't remember him at all, and I need to in order to help. Besides, you say I've been here before. Maybe if you tell me about Clark and the things here it'll help jog my memory. If I could remember these powers you say I have I might be able to help find him."

And so she talked, taking him on a tour of the apartment and pointing

out the different things that Clark Kent apparently valued. She showed him the picture of Clark's parents, and his souvenir football from Midwest U where he'd gotten his degree in journalism. She showed him Clark's Kerth Award and the photo of the two of them taken at the awards ceremony. The expression on his face showed Superman exactly how Clark Kent felt about Lois Lane. He couldn't picture any man more besotted with a woman than her partner. She talked about him, telling Superman everything she could think of, from his origins in Smallville, Kansas to his infuriating habit of running off at the most inopportune moments. When she had finished, he stood staring at the photo of the man. He looked vaguely familiar, but Superman simply could not bring any personal knowledge about him to mind, other than what Lois had told him. He must have known Clark Kent well, but the information was buried in his vanished memory. At last he gave an exasperated shrug. Lois put a comforting hand on his. "Don't try to push it, Superman. It will come back in time."

He forced a smile. "I hope so. Maybe now you could tell me a little about myself -- things that weren't in those articles. I'm sure you didn't print everything you know about me."

"Yes, that's true. I'm afraid I don't know as much about you as I'd like. You come from Krypton, which blew up about 29 years ago. Its sun was red, according to you. We think your powers might be the result of Earth's yellow sun."

"So I'm solar powered, huh?"

She gave the faintest of smiles. "Maybe. You were sent here by your parents somehow; you said they chose Earth because we look so much like Kryptonians that you could blend in. If they knew about the powers you would have they didn't tell you."

"So I arrived here as a child?"

"Evidently. You appeared about two years ago. I guess I was the first person who actually met you. You saved the Messenger Rocket and the space program, and incidentally my life, when you swallowed a bomb that had been planted on the ship."

"I swallowed a bomb?"

She nodded. "I saw you do it. I thought you were crazy."

He chuckled softly. "I can understand that." Then he frowned, considering the next question carefully, and decided he needed to know. "Lois, I don't mean to make you uncomfortable...I mean, I know you're in love with Clark, but did you and I ever have any sort of, well, relationship?"

Her eyes widened. "Why do you ask that?"

He hesitated. "I sort of knew it last night when you came into the emergency room. I mean, were we ever serious about each other?"

He watched a flush darken her cheeks and quickly tried to recover. "If it bothers you, you don't need to talk about it."

She took a deep breath. "No, it's all right. I had a huge crush on you for a long time, and I think you liked me a lot, too. But,

finally I realized that there wasn't really any room in your life for me. I mean, you take care of the whole world. Besides, there was Clark. He's my partner, and I realized I was falling in love with him. It was weird, really. I mean, I felt like I loved two men, and...oh, I don't know how to explain it. It was pretty confusing. I finally decided I had to choose the one I cared for most."

"I understand." He brushed the hair away from her face. "Your Clark's a lucky man. I hope he knows what he has."

They were silent for a long moment, then he switched the subject abruptly back to something that had struck him at the time. "Lois, you said I swallowed a bomb?"

She almost jumped and visibly brought herself back to the present. "Yes. Like I said, I thought you were crazy, but when it exploded all it did to you was make you burp a little."

"That must have been gross."

"No, not really. I hardly noticed, actually. After all, you'd just saved my life and the lives of a whole lot of other people. Then you just lifted the Messenger into orbit. It was incredible, I can tell you."

"But, Lois, something doesn't make sense here. I swallowed a bomb and all it did was make me belch, but that explosion last night caused so much trauma that it made me lose my memory. That's not very consistent."

They stared at each other for a time. "No, it isn't." He watched her face as she thought about it, and saw the light dawn. "Superman, there is one thing that can hurt you that we know of."

"And that is...?"

"Well, we call it Kryptonite. It's supposed to be part of your home planet. Only a few pieces of it are known to exist, but if it gets near you it causes you pain and weakens you. Too much exposure can take away your powers or even kill you. There's another form of it, too: Red Kryptonite. It made you apathetic; you just sort of stopped caring about anything. You thought you were having a nervous breakdown until you found out what was really causing it. If you were somehow exposed to it during all that last night, it might have helped cause something like this."

"Is there any way we can find out?"

She was frowning now, obviously thinking hard. "Well, one thing we don't do is get you anywhere near the debris. If there was Kryptonite on that ship, it's somewhere at the bottom of Metropolis Harbor right now. You don't need any more exposure; once did enough damage. Let's call Perry. Maybe we can get some information on the ship -- where it was from, who owns it and so forth." She was reaching for the phone as she spoke.

Jimmy Olsen answered. He listened to her theory and promised to get the information and call them back as soon as possible. Lois put down the phone and held up crossed fingers.

The phone rang ten minutes later. Superman grabbed it first.
"Hello?"

"Man, Superman, you sound just like CK over the phone. Look, I got the information Lois asked for, but you might want to know the cops just picked up a guy who was trying to use CK's credit cards to buy out Broadhurst's Department Store. So far he isn't talking, but Henderson says he knows him. He's just a petty thief: no violent felonies on his record."

"Well, that's one plus. Lois was afraid Clark might have been mugged. How about the rest?"

"Well the cargo ship was registered to some company in the Cayman Islands called Caribbean Imports. Ever hear of it?"

"Jimmy, I don't even remember my own boot size right now."

There was a chuckle at the other end of the phone. "Sorry. Anyway, they've got a warehouse over on Pier 17. What's this all about, anyhow?"

"Lois can tell you all about it later if it pans out, all right? I have the feeling that she and I are going to be heading over there as soon as I give her the information."

"Your memory must be starting to come back, Superman. You've got Lois figured out pretty well: as much as any guy ever will, anyway."

Superman laughed and signed off. Lois was standing by his elbow.
"What did he say?"

He relayed the information Jimmy had given him. Lois nodded. "Let's go. I'd rather be doing something besides just sitting here stewing."

He surveyed himself. "Uh, I'm not exactly inconspicuous in this outfit, Lois. Do you think Clark would mind if I borrowed something of his?"

"Of course not. I think he has some jeans and a sweatshirt somewhere around here. Why don't you go see?"

Clark Kent's clothing fitted him perfectly, he thought as he surveyed himself in the mirror a few minutes later. The jeans were comfortable and slightly worn, and a lot less conspicuous than the Suit. He also felt less exposed. Ignore it as he tried, the snugness of the outfit was a little embarrassing to contemplate. He hadn't missed the glances the female staff of the Daily Planet had given him this morning, or where they were looking. The most dignified thing he'd been able to think of had been to act completely unaware of it, but he'd been uncomfortable. This was much better.

The expression on Lois's face seemed to indicate that she thought so, too, but all she said was, "Let's go."

* * *

>The trip to Metropolis Harbor took almost an hour in the heavy rush

hour traffic. Superman sat in the passenger seat and watched her drive. In spite of her obvious unhappiness, she paid attention to where she was going and drove with care. Once, she glanced at him with a tiny smile. "Clark does that," she said.<p><p>

"Does what?"

"Sits like that and watches me. Lots of men don't like to be driven by a woman, but he doesn't care. He says he likes to watch me drive."

"Well, I can't disagree with him. What do you expect to find at Pier 17?"

"I don't know. But if there was Kryptonite on that ship, it might not have been there by accident. Besides, something about this whole business smells."

A sharp memory flashed suddenly into his mind. He frowned and covered his eyes with one hand, trying to hold onto it. Smells! What had Lois said? Something about this whole business smells?

"Superman? Are you all right?" her voice asked, sounding a little worried.

He lowered the hand. "Smell," he said.

"What? Are you okay?"

"The smell. When I was in the hold of the ship there was a smell." He rubbed his face with one hand. "Just before the explosion. I've smelled it before, but I can't remember where."

"You remember?" The excitement in her voice made him smile.

"Only a little, but I guess it's a start, isn't it?"

"Yes. I told you it would be okay." Her expression changed as she remembered the part that was not yet okay. He turned farther toward her in the seat.

"Lois, as soon as I can, I'll do everything in my power to find him for you. That's a promise."

"I know you will." She stepped on the accelerator and they inched on toward the harbor at the reckless speed of fifteen miles an hour.

The sun was sitting on the horizon when they pulled up near the docks and got out of the Jeep to see what could be seen. Out in the bay, boats were circling. Some kind of salvage operation was being attempted, although, considering the magnitude of the explosion, it seemed unlikely that there would be that much to recover intact.

Lois pointed. "See where those boats are cruising around? The ship was in the middle of that area. You picked up people in the water, then you flew down into the ship itself. The only thing I could figure was that you were trying to find the source of the fire. Then it blew and we saw it throw you through the air. It was a huge

explosion."

Superman squinted at the scene, rubbing his face. He could hear the cries of the people struggling in the water. He'd rescued them, he recalled hazily. Then he'd flown down into the ship itself trying to find the source of the fire as Lois had surmised. He could feel the heat, see the fire licking at him, almost alive, frenzied at its inability to burn him. He'd reached the cargo hold. There had been that smell, and a sudden jolt of pain had stabbed through him. And the world blew up.

Lois's hand was on his arm. "Superman, are you all right?"

He glanced down at her, surprised as always that this indomitable woman came only to his nose even wearing heels. She was looking up at him, a little worried.

"Yeah. I remember a little. I think you must be right about the Kryptonite. I think I felt it while I was in the hold, right before the explosion, just for a split second. It's all pretty foggy."

"Well, it's more than you were remembering an hour or two ago. I think that's good progress."

"Yeah. It's too bad I can't go down there to look for it, but I still don't remember how."

"It's just as well. Are you out of your mind? Go down there, looking for something that can kill you, or wipe out your memory again? Leave it there!"

He laughed a little. "Yes, ma'am. I yield to your superior logic. Let's just hope those salvage guys don't find it."

"If you'd seen that explosion, I don't think you'd worry. It could be anywhere within a radius of about two miles. That's a lot of very muddy water, weeds and trash to search through."

"You're probably right. So what's next on the agenda?"

"Next, we go to check out the warehouse."

He glanced at the sun. "Don't you think it would be a better idea to wait until it's darker? Breaking and entering seems to me to be an activity you don't want to advertise."

"I just want to drive by it right now. Then we'll go get something to eat and come back after sundown. Suddenly I have a feeling that things are starting to go our way."

"I hope you're right." He turned his head to survey the bay again before they climbed back into the Jeep. "Wasn't it almost this time that all this started yesterday?"

"Actually, it was about an hour later." She started the engine, pulled a u-turn under the nose of a no u-turn sign, and drove back the way they had come. "I think Pier 17 is off to the left."

* * *

>It was two hours later that Lois pulled the Jeep onto a dark side street and cut the engine. She glanced at him sitting in the seat beside her. "I can't believe it. You eat like Clark. A double chiliburger loaded with every kind of disgustingly fattening addition you could find and every garnish in the book. Not to mention a large fries, onion rings and two chocolate malts! If I ate like that I'd look like a blimp in no time."<p><p>

He glanced at her, admiring her petite figure in the jeans and t-shirt. "Somehow, I can't picture it."

"That's because you don't have to watch your weight. I'll bet your metabolism burns it all up and more."

"I wouldn't know. I'd guess that flying would probably burn up a good many calories."

"Do you remember flying?"

He shook his head slightly. "Kind of, but it's pretty hazy. Still, things must be starting to come back or I wouldn't even remember that."

"I told you, it's just a matter of time," Lois said. "Are you ready?"

He opened the door and stepped out. "As I'll ever be."

Lois slipped out of her side and locked the door. Both she and Superman were feeling somewhat better. While they'd been eating, Lois had called the office to be met with the news that Henderson had really pushed things through for them. The police had dragged the river in the area where Clark's wallet had been found. Two bodies had been recovered, but neither was Clark; one was female, and the other had been in the water much too long. Both Lois and Superman had begun to entertain hopes that whatever had happened to Clark Kent, he might be alive somewhere, only in need of being found. Superman was aware of the impracticality of that hope, but he clung to it all the same. The thought of Lois being as unhappy as he had seen her earlier was enough to make him want to die. It wasn't an option, if he could do anything about it.

The area around the warehouse was dark and quiet, except for the intermittent snarls of fighting cats in the distance. Streetlights were dim and several were out. They kept to the shadows, moving as quietly as they could as they approached their target, a huge, dimly lighted warehouse by Pier 17.

There was no sign of a night watchman as they stood in the shadow of a neighboring building. Superman tried to focus his hearing, the famous super hearing Lois had told him about, but all he could hear was the ripple of water lapping against the pier, the faint sound of the breeze and the occasional rustle of a scavenger in the alley trash cans. He let Lois lead the way, as she seemed to be more experienced with this kind of activity. They crept down the side of the warehouse, between it and the neighboring one, careful not to kick stray bits of garbage on the ground, and suddenly there was a door in the wall. It was locked, of course, but this time they were ready. Superman grasped the doorknob and twisted. The thing came out

in his hands, and Lois eased the door open.

Inside, the air smelled musty. Piles of boxes rose on every side, and debris littered the floor underfoot. They moved forward an inch at a time, not really sure what they were searching for.

To Superman, this all had an eerie feel of familiarity. Surely this was not the first time he had done this in the company of this same woman. He crept forward, careful to stay in front of her in case they ran into trouble, moving between mountains of anonymous cargo, ears alert for any sound. He could hear the scurry of tiny feet in the dust, probably rats, he reflected, and somewhere in the building the shuffle of human feet. Several sets of human feet. Certainly more than should be here at this time of night. He stopped.

Lois tapped his back from behind. "What is it?" Her voice was a bare whisper, but he heard it clearly. The realization was almost expected. His super hearing was back. He had been using it without being aware of it for some time.

"I hear something. People."

"I don't hear...you can hear it?"

"Yes."

"Yes!" The single whispered word was loud, but only to him. He grinned at her in sheer happiness.

"Easy there, or you'll deafen me."

She hugged him spontaneously. "It's coming back! I told you it wouldn't be long!"

"Shhh! We don't want them to hear us!"

She nodded, her grin still wide and brilliant in the dimness. "Too bad your x-ray vision isn't in working order yet. You could look inside this stuff and see what they've got here."

The same thought had occurred to him. He paused beside a large crate, peeking around the corner to see if the coast was clear. If there was anything illegal here they didn't want to alert anyone to the fact that someone had discovered it. All at once he smelled it, the same scent he had detected in the hold of the ship, only this time it wasn't masked by the odors of many different substances in the process of incineration. He'd smelled this stuff before many times. Drugs. Someone had lost a great deal of money when that ship had burned. Hidden in the hold, or inside the hull, or somewhere undoubtedly very clever, had been a fortune in drugs, concealed too well for even the noses of the drug-sniffing dogs, but not too faint for Superman's nose to detect. Instinctively now, he squinted at the crate and it was as if the wood had dissolved, revealing padding, perfectly legitimate merchandise, and a cleverly hidden compartment stuffed with packets of white powder.

"Got it!" Even the whisper sounded elated. "It's back!"

"What do you see?"

"About two million dollars worth of cocaine. And this is only one crate."

Her lips pursed in sheer astonishment. "I think we've found what we came for. Let's get out of here."

"Shhh!" He put a finger to his lips. "Someone's coming."

"I tell you, I heard something!" The voice came from only yards away.

"Over here!"

Without conscious thought, he slipped an arm about Lois's waist, and they were floating silently upward into the dimness of the rafters. Below them, men could be seen creeping around, flashing their lights between the boxes, searching for the source of the noise. Someone tripped and fell to the ground, swearing loudly. Superman's eyes met Lois's and they exchanged a silent chuckle.

Superman raised his eyebrows. "I think we've seen enough, don't you, Miss Lane? Why don't we get out of here?"

* * *

>The desk sergeant at the headquarters of the Metropolis Police Department looked up as a man entered the room. He was tall and dark-haired, wearing a pair of somewhat battered looking glasses. Most importantly, he was drenched from head to toe. Slowly, with an air of bone deep fatigue, he approached the desk and rested his arms on the counter. The sergeant could detect the distinctive scent of salt water. He leaned forward. "Are you all right?"<p><p>

A nod. "I hear you've been looking for me." The man pushed wavy, black, very wet hair back from his forehead and somewhat ineffectively swiped at the water that was pooling on the surface in front of him. "My name is Clark Kent."

The sergeant barely restrained a four-letter word. "Henderson's got the whole department looking for you!"

"Yeah. Superman told me." He sank suddenly onto a nearby chair as if his legs wouldn't hold him any longer. "He pulled me out."

"Out of where?" The sergeant abruptly realized that Kent was patently exhausted and rose from his seat. "Look, lemme get you a blanket, and I'll call Henderson. You're gonna catch your death that way..."

Fifteen minutes later, Lois Lane erupted into Inspector Henderson's office, followed by Perry White and Jimmy. Clark was sitting in one of Henderson's office chairs dressed in borrowed sweats with a blanket around his shoulders. Lois flew across the room and had her arms around him almost before the other two were through the door. "Clark! You're alive! Superman found you!"

He felt guilty deceiving her along with the others, but he could straighten it out with her later. "Yeah. He did."

"Where were you? What happened?"

"That's what I'd like to know." Henderson surveyed Clark with a sour expression. "He staggers in here sopping wet, gets my rug soaked, not to mention that chair out front, and tells me Superman saved him, but won't explain anything else until the rest of you get here. Well, they're here, so talk!"

Henderson wasn't nearly as upset as he was acting. Clark could see the grin hiding under the scowl, but the officer wasn't about to admit to anything like human feeling. He drew in his breath and embarked on the biggest whopper he could ever remember telling in his life. At least it wasn't spur-of-the-moment, and if he had to, Superman could back him up. "I was in the engine room of the cargo ship." That, at least, wasn't exactly a lie. He had been there for a few minutes a short time ago.

"Under the bay?" Lois looked horrified.

"Yes. I found out they might be smuggling drugs and was investigating. Then..." He let the sentence hang.

"You mean you were there when the thing blew? Great shades of Elvis!" Perry looked almost as stunned as Lois.

"Yes. Superman said the engine room was the only part of the ship that survived intact. Whatever blew up, it wasn't the engines. The room was mostly water tight, but ..."

"You mean, you've been under there since last night?" Jimmy was staring at him in awe. "Man, what a story!"

"Young idiot!" Henderson looked really annoyed. "You could have been killed, and it's a miracle you weren't! Do you have any idea what we've been going through trying to find you?"

"Some. Superman told me a little. He brought me here so I could get the search called off. He said something about keeping an eye on some kind of drug raid."

"He and I found the drugs in that warehouse on Pier 17," Lois said. "It belongs to the same company that owned the ship."

"Yeah. Lane's getting Superman started with the same stuff you two are famous for." Henderson glared at him, but Clark could see the corners of his mouth twitch. The Inspector waved a hand. "Take him home, Lois. Get him out of my office. And Clark, if you ever pull anything this stupid again, I swear I'll put you in protective custody for your own safety! Is that clear? Now get out of here!"

* * *

>Lois dropped him off at his apartment. He was worn out. It had been one of the more stressful days that he could ever recall in his life, but before he opened his door he tried for the third time to apologize to Lois. She cut him off.<p><p>

"Clark, I should be mad at you, but I'm too happy you're here and safe. We can talk about it later. You said in your letter that there was something you've been trying to tell me. Why don't you come by for breakfast tomorrow morning and we can talk about it then?"

"All right."

Lois put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "When I thought you might be dead I wanted to die, too, you jerk! Don't you ever do anything like this to me again! Is that clear?"

He kissed her back. "Very clear."

"Good. I'll see you in the morning." She started to turn away, but something made her pause. "Oh, oh."

"What?"

"Your parents. Martha said they'd be arriving in Metropolis tonight. You were supposed to call them."

The door to his apartment opened as she spoke. Martha Kent stood there, her hands on her hips. "It's a little late for that." She eyed her errant son sternly. "I trust you have a good explanation?"

Lois began to laugh. "Does he ever! Good luck, Clark. You're going to need it!"

"You have no idea, Lois." He'd need luck all right, but not with his parents. His memory had returned in the warehouse, although certain parts were still a little fuzzy, but the cause was still unknown. He was inclined to think, however, that Lois might have been right in her guess. The same thing had happened with the Nightfall Asteroid. What if this incident had been a direct result of that? The Earth had certainly been peppered with shooting stars for several nights afterwards. It might explain what otherwise looked like an incredible coincidence.

But if that were true, or even partially true, that meant that somewhere on the bottom of Metropolis Harbor was a more than ordinarily dangerous piece of Kryptonite. He'd have to alert Henderson about that, to let his men know to look for it during the investigation, not that there was much of a chance of finding it. His mind skipped ahead to tomorrow morning. This had been the final straw. He couldn't count on the Fates or Lady Luck to give him many more chances. Tomorrow morning he would tell her. That was when the luck was really going to be needed. In spades.

He leaned down to give her a peck on the cheek and shook his head ruefully. "Believe me, luck isn't the only thing I'm going to need. I'll see you in the morning."

Epilogue.

On the bottom of Metropolis Harbor a nondescript piece of rock lay anonymously amid the sand, weeds and debris. Inside the rock was a chunk of crystal, ominously green and speckled with tiny flecks of red. It lay there, timelessly, and the denizens of the ocean, plant and animal, lived their lives around it. It might lie there for a very long time. But it was still there.

The End

End
file.